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10-2014

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Recommended Citation

Odong, Maranatha, "On God's Wing, New Meaning in Life through Faith" (2014). *Lake Union Herald*. 144.
<https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/luh-pubs/144>

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On God's Wings

NEW MEANING IN LIFE THROUGH FAITH

BY MARANATHA ODONG

The journey that led me to Andrew University was a miraculous one, and I am still amazed. I did not intend to study at Andrews, nor was any university in my thoughts. Although I had a seemingly normal life for a grade 12 student, I was depressed. Only God knew about it. I was struggling to live, play and learn, but I was sealed in a bottle, dying slowly from the inside. Each day of school was a nightmare; I started and ended every day with a different kind of bullying, and was sometimes covered in my own blood for defending my faith and my unique name. Yet, with determination and faith, I faced another day.

My mother was unaware of most of these things because I could not stand to load her with my burdens when she already had hers — which were even heavier than mine to carry. I thought of myself as a “cursed child” and always wondered how God could have created me in his image when every day was the same struggle.

In grade nine, I prayed a prayer that I did not know was answered until the end of 2012. I woke up one morning with the thought, *I am going to Andrews University*. I had never seen my mother so happy. Still, I was afraid Andrews would not accept me due to my GPA, which was quite low due to my depression and resulting lack of concentration on academics.

In addition to my low GPA, I had no idea how I would pay tuition, my visa was delayed, and I still needed to apply for student loans. In faith, I booked my flight and left the rest to God.

The moment the plane landed, the heavy burden on my shoulders lifted and I was free. During orientation week, the friendly people I met quickly deflated the defensive bubble I had kept around myself all my life. I enjoyed going to class each day just to hear devotions and a prayer. This had never happened in any school I enrolled in previously. I attended every chapel, week of prayer and, especially, Friday night vespers. I looked forward to every service.



Maranatha Odong

One night at Fusion, a combination Christian concert and vespers program that filled the Howard Center once a month on Friday nights, the topic was forgiveness. At that time, I was struggling to forgive someone, but that evening I knew God was calling me to do just that. So I did.

As my life started to change, my spiritual life grew, and I no longer felt I was in the bottomless pit of depression. Eventually, I became a social butterfly and mingled with everyone instead of isolating myself. The small chapel in Lamson Hall became my sanctuary, where I still spend time with God on a regular basis. I know I will continue to struggle with situations life gives me, but God will always be there for me.

On the last day of spring semester, I realized I was closer to God than ever before, and had gained a depth of understanding about life — especially my spiritual life, and how important it is to maintain it. Everything that Andrews does to help students with their spiritual life I was able to use to affirm my faith. My experience with God at Andrews has transformed me completely.

All the struggles and pain I have endured in my life were part of God's plan to mold me into an independent young woman, and give me the understanding that God can turn an ugly scar into something beautiful, with purpose. The pain, guilt, shame and fear that covered my eyes so I could not see

God's work in me was removed, and now I know that God has been with me ever since I was born. Because of him, I soar like an eagle. He allowed me to come to a university I never dreamed I could attend, and gave me a new meaning in life through faith in God.

I'm not sure what he holds for my future, but I am looking forward to it because if he did it before, he will do it again.

Maranatha Odong is a sophomore biology pre-med major at Andrews University with a minor in chemistry.

The Cookie Man

BAKED GOODS AND PRAYER

BY MELODIE ROSCHMAN

It's Thursday night, and in Meier Hall a freshman is studying for his first Foundations of Biology exam when he hears a knock at the door. Opening it, he sees not a friend or a dean, but a smiling man wearing glasses and a bowtie. "It's Dr. Shepherd," the man says, holding out a plastic container. "Try one of my wife's world-famous chocolate chip cookies."

To Seminary faculty and students, Tom Shepherd is director of the Ph.D. in religion and Th.D. programs and professor of New Testament interpretation. To the young men who live in Meier and Burman halls, however, he is simply "The Cookie Man." Every Thursday during fall and spring semesters, Tom's wife, Sherry, bakes four dozen chocolate chip cookies, and he takes them to campus, working his way through the dorms, floor by floor, throughout the semester.

"I ask how things are going, what they did for the summer, what classes they are taking, about some project they're working on — just take an interest in them," he says. "And I always end the same way: 'So, who should we pray for tonight?'"

Tom's cookie ministry began 17 years ago when he was teaching undergraduate religion at Union College in Lincoln, Nebraska. "I was concerned for the young men," he



Seminary professor Tom Shepherd makes time regularly to visit students in the residence halls with fresh-baked cookies and a friendly smile.

explains. "They seemed like ships without rudders. One day, I was talking with a theology major about this, and he confronted me, 'You don't know what our life is like,' he said. 'You've never even been to the dorm.' He was right, I hadn't."

Tom says he didn't have any great master plan, but thought he could go to the dorm and pray with the young men. Sherry happily said she would make cookies for Tom to take along.

"In all the years since, I can probably count on one or two hands the number of times someone has said, 'No, don't pray for me.'"

When Tom came to the Seminary at Andrews in 2008, he decided to continue his cookies-and-prayer tradition. It was a simple thing to do, he says, and it's an unexpected way to show students that the faculty and staff of Andrews care about them.